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NATIONAL MONUMENTS

Trump could shrink Bears Ears by 85% — report

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter
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Local business leaders are criticizing President Trump's expected decision to shrink Bears Ears National Monument in Utah. Bob Wick/Bureau of Land Management/Flickr

President Trump is expected to announce Monday that he will eliminate nearly 85 percent of Bear Ears National Monument in southeastern Utah, cutting more than 1 million acres from its current boundaries, *The Washington Post* is reporting.

Documents obtained by the newspaper also show that Trump intends to halve the size of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in southwestern Utah.

The new boundaries would split the existing sites into five new smaller national monuments and eliminate Bears Ears as the moniker of any of the sites.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but the Interior Department dismissed the documents as out of date.

"The Post's information is antiquated and inaccurate," said Interior spokeswoman Heather Swift.

House Natural Resources Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) today praised Trump's planned visit to Salt Lake City on Monday, when he is expected to unveil the finalized cuts.

"Utah has become ground zero for politically motivated national monument designations that are excessive in size and contemptuous of peoples' livelihoods," Bishop said in a statement. "The President has stood against prior abuses of executive power and his administration has demonstrated a commitment to work in concert with local communities to protect unique public antiquities and objects the right way."

According to the *Post's* documents, Trump will establish two monuments totaling about 201,000 acres from the more than 1.35-million-acre footprint of Bears Ears National Monument.

The new sites would be known as Indian Creek National Monument and the Shash Jaa National Monument.

In addition, he would reduce Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument from 1.9 million acres to more than 997,000 acres.

The remaining acreage would be split into three sites: Grand Staircase National Monument, Kaiparowits National Monument and Escalante Canyons National Monument.

The reductions would total more than 1.1 million acres, vastly outstripping all prior reductions made by past presidents.

According to National Park Service records, previous reductions — the most recent of which occurred in 1963 when President Kennedy altered the boundaries of Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico — total more than 461,000 acres.

It remains to be seen whether Trump will also announce reductions for other national monuments.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke advised the president in a private report in late August to make unspecified cuts to the Utah monuments as well as Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in Oregon and California, Gold Butte National Monument in Nevada, Rose Atoll Marine National Monument, and Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument ([Greenwire](#), Sept. 18).

Environmental and conservation groups, as well as Democratic lawmakers, have vowed to challenge in court any effort to reduce monuments.

Those organizations argue that while the Antiquities Act of 1906 allows presidents to set aside public land as a national monument to preserve areas of historic, cultural or scientific

interest, it does not grant the authority to reduce monuments. No prior boundary changes have ever been tested in court.

"Trump's unprecedented attack on the monuments would be another affront to Native Americans and a disgrace to the office of president," Center for Biological Diversity Public Lands Program Director Randi Spivak said. "He wants to turn public lands over to corporations to mine, frack, bulldoze and clear-cut until there's nothing left."

Local pushback

Members of the Western Leaders Network, a Colorado-based organization that aims to unite local officials and tribal leaders, today continued to urge the White House not to alter the monuments, arguing it could have a devastating impact on local economies.

"From a pure economic standpoint, the idea of shrinking the boundaries just doesn't make sense," said Ashley Korenblat, who owns Western Spirit Cycling in Moab, Utah.

She also criticized Utah lawmakers for promoting national parks in the state while urging the Trump administration to reduce the size of national monuments.

"What we're seeing right now across the public lands in Utah is that the national parks are full. We have had a wildly successful advertising campaign. ... There are lines to get into the parks," she said. "To reduce the number of places that people can go is a problem. It doesn't make sense."

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